

A

REVIEW

OF THE

STATE

OF THE

BRITISH NATION.

Tuesday, April 22. 1707.

I Was come in the Survey of our Reformation to examine the Original of Dissenting from the Church of England, I have told the Cause, Persons, and Behaviour of those we called *Puritans*, who were the first Dissenters from the Church of England; I would a little here note, what kind of Dissenters they were, how they dissented, and how it was apparent they conform'd, as far as Conscience would permit them, shunning to the last any Rent from the Unity of the Body.

Let no Man infer, that therefore the Separation is of Consequence a Sin, lest I be oblig'd to retort, that all Consequences lie at the Door of their Causes, and that the Sin of Separation, *let that be what it will*, lies fairly charg'd upon those, that forc'd those conscientious People to separate or act against their Consciences.

Still it will remain to prove that Force, *say some People*; let such go back to the Book of Sports, the Original of which I have by me, and there they may see, what Endeavours were us'd to drive all conscientious People *not into*, but out of the Church— For it is easie to prove, the State-Politicks of the Times, *I cannot say the Church-Politicks*, for they were but a Kind of second Causes in the Matter, study'd to drive the innocent People upon all Extremities, that they might make the Advantage of their Scruples to their Destruction; first make them Schismatick, *as they call it*, and then reproach them as Schismaticks.

I say, this was the State-Politicks of that Day; for 'tis evident, that as soon as ever the Government came to it self, there was a general Turn put upon all these things, and the Church immediately declar'd,
 " Per-

" Persecution for Conscience to be contrary to the Christian Religion, and the Doctrine of the Church of *England*. Vide the Preface to the first *Occasional-Bill*.

From hence is clearly obviated, that feign'd Story of the Lenity of the *High-Church* Men, in mercifully granting Liberty of Conscience, and tolerating the Exercise of Religious Worship to their Fellow-Christians; for besides, what I have said in another Place about the Capitulation of a Treaty, and the Dissenters demanding their Liberty as a stipulated Consideration; this is plain from their own Declaration in Parliament, that to persecute is contrary, not to the Doctrine of the Church of *England* only, but to the very Principles of the Christian Religion: Now I know no *Medium* between Persecution and Toleration, for not to tolerate, is to persecute; and where's the Condescension and Compassion, where the Generosity and Courtship of only refraining what to do would be acting both against the Principles of the Christian Religion in general, and the Doctrine of their own Church in particular?

But all this is by the Way, I return to the old *Puritans*, who were the first Dissenters from the Church of *England*, and why were they call'd *Puritans*? The Name was given them in Derision, but was so just an Appellation, not only suited to the Pretence, but the known Practice of their Lives, that I need say no more of them, than with the famous *Erasmus's* known Expression,

Sit Anima mea cum Puritanis Anglicanis.

Their blameless Conversations, exact Piety, large Charity, Christian Example, and general Character, answer all that could ever be said in their Favour.

The Question that remains concerning them, is, how they came to be Dissenters from the Church of *England*? And this is necessary to examine, to make out the present Head of Discourse, which I am bringing down to the present Case, that we may see,

of what Affinity we are all in this now united Island, by which it will soon appear, that the Causes of our Breaches are not so great, nor the Breaches themselves so wide, but that a necessary Portion of Charity would reconcile us all.

These *Puritans* I have been speaking of, tho' they scrupled several things in the Worship of the Church of *England*, yet allowing her, as we do, still to be sound in Doctrine, they made Conscience of separating from her in Communion, unless they were forc'd to it; and therefore they never erected separate Assemblies, or at least did not communicate in them for many Years, after their Consciences first rejected the Common Prayer.

But such was the fatal Spirit among the *High Party*, even in those Days, even just as it has been now; their Design was not to have the Uniformity of Worship preserv'd, if it had, they would have yielded a few indifferent things at first, which if they had done, there had been no Breach at all: For Divisions in the Church, like Fire in a House, the longer it is neglected, the farther they spread, till at last they become incurable.

The Design of the Court was to drive these good People to some Extremes, thereby to make them liable to the Law, and then take the Opportunity to oppress them.

And when all other Remedies had fail'd, the first Step they took, was to persuade the King to that fatal Step to his Reputation, as well as to the Protestant Religion, and the Nation's Morals; I mean, the *Book of Sports*.

Never was the true *English* Spirit so discover'd as in this; for as if a Temper hating all Manner of Force was rooted in their Nature, when the People, who were bad enough already, were commanded to be worse, they started at the Hellish Proposal, and reform'd even of what they were before——But of this more in our next.

MISCELLANEA.

THE last Paper entred a little into a short Conversation between the Judge and a cruel Creditor, upon the Subject of keeping the poor Debtor in Prison; he had kept the poor Man in Bonds about 12 Year, and not content with that, was not yet willing to deliver him, tho' he knew he had nothing to pay, and the Judge very closely ask'd him, since he own'd, a Prison had not made him more able to pay; Why he was willing to keep him there any longer, it was difficult for him to form a clear Answer to this Question, and the Man being press'd by the Judge, returns,

Cr. I don't know, but keeping him a Prisoner may move his Friends to relieve him.

Judge. Well, now you say something rational; but do you not think, if he had not lost all his Friends, he would have lain so long?

Cr. I am not willing to discharge him, my Lord.

Judge. But I am, and I think, the Law does and would fain have Thee willing too, because I think it's most rational.

Cr. I don't take him to be honest.

Judge. It's ordinary to say, every Man is a Knave that does not pay his Debts, without examining whether he be able or not.

Cr. I do not believe, my Lord, if he were able, he would pay me.

Judge. How shall the Man convince you of the contrary to that?

Cr. I shall not believe him, my Lord, let him say what he will.

Judge. Pray, when he was able to pay something, did he offer any thing of Composition?

Cr. Yes, he made a Proposal of 15 s. in the Pound.

Judge. And you was one of them, that would not accept it, was you?

Cr. Yes, my Lord, I did refuse to compound with him.

Judge. Pray, shall I ask you, why you refus'd so large an Offer?

Cr. My Lord, he might easily have paid me and 2 or 3 more, and all the rest were willing to compound, and if he had been honest, he had done it, and now he has paid no Body.

Judge. Really Sir, you give but a strange Specimen of Honesty your self, that you can say, it had been honest to have paid you all, and let the rest of his Creditors have far'd the worse.

Cr. My Lord, it was honest for him to pay me a just Debt.

Judge. I am of another Opinion, it had been honest for him to have paid you before his Failing; but after that his Debt became a publick Obligation to all his Creditors as a Body, and to have paid one more than another, had been dishonest to the rest—— But, Sir, you own, you believe he is unable to pay you now, why would you keep him in Prison?

Cr. Because I believe, if he was able, he would not pay me.

Judge. That's punishing the Man for a Crime, and not seeking your Debt, and you only suppose the Crime too. Indeed, I think you are in the wrong, pray, what is it you seek of the Man?

Cr. My Money, my Lord.

Judge. But you are satisfy'd, he is not able, you say?

Cr. I believe he is not.

Judge. And you own, you do not believe a Prison will make him able; pray, why should you keep him in Prison then? It can be for nothing but Anger at the Man, and a Resolution to destroy him, which this Law is made to prevent, and therefore I must discharge him; but I said this to you to convince you, that you act against Reason, and against your self in it; for if the Man has his Liberty, he may pay you; if he is kept in Prison, you are sure he never can.

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